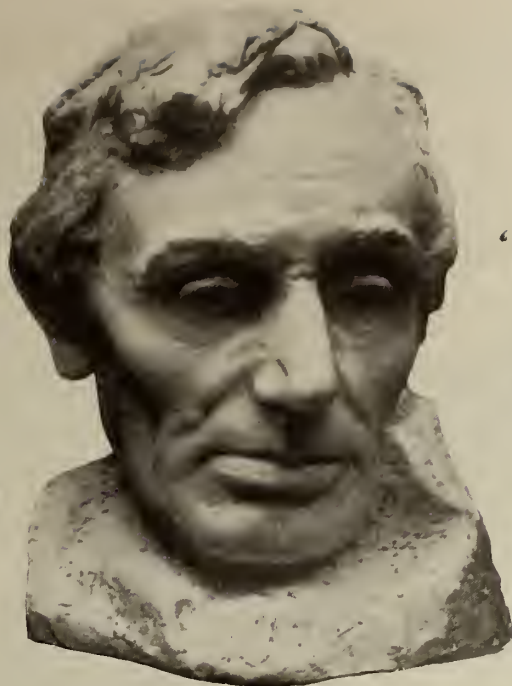


A Thanksgiving Story of Abraham Lincoln



The famous Borglum head of Lincoln, in the Capitol at Washington. Copyright, by Gutzon Borglum.

"To my mind the noblest holiday in the world is Thanksgiving. And next the Creator there is no one the holiday should be dedicated to as much as to mothers."
Abraham Lincoln.

This Story is True, Even to the Words Spoken, and It Never Before has been Published. It was Told to Me by the Man Who was Jason.—*Honnie Willsie*

"BENEFITS FORGOT"

OLD Pilgrim kept his ears back and his eyes on his mistress. He breathed heavily, but otherwise he did not stir. He was a large horse, a gray, with a small, intelligent head and a chest and barrel like an elephant's. On his right fore shoulder was a great three-cornered tear, from which the skin hung in a bloody fold. Jason was sewing this up. Jason's mother, who was also Pilgrim's mistress, held the candle with one hand while she stroked the big gray's nose with the other.

"Be careful, Jason, do!" she said softly.

Jason grunted. "You keep him from biting or kicking and I'll do my share," he said.

"Pilgrim bite!" cried Jason's mother softly. "Why he knows exactly what you are doing and why!"

Again Jason grunted, working swiftly, with the skill of trained and accustomed fingers. The candle flickered on his cool young face, on his black hair and on his long, strong, surgeon's fingers. It flickered too on his mother's sweet lips, on her tired brown eyes and iron-gray hair. It put high-lights on the cameo at her throat and made a grotesque shadow of her hoop-skirts on the stable wall.

Finally Jason straightened himself with a sigh and wiped his hands on a towel.

"That's a good job," he said. "Must be some bad spikes in the pasture fence to have given him that rip.—Get over there!"

This last to Pilgrim, who suddenly had put his head on Jason's shoulder with a soft nuzzling of his nose against the young doctor's cheek and a little winny that was almost human.

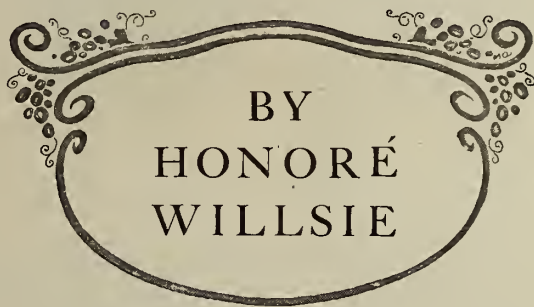
"Why, Jason, he's thanking you!" cried his mother.

JASON gave the horse a careless slap and started out the stable door.

"You'll be having it that he speaks Greek next," he said.

"You don't know him," replied Jason's mother. "This is the first time you ever saw him, remember. These last three years of your father's life he's been like one of the family." She followed Jason into the cottage. "Often and often before your poor father died he said he'd never have been able to keep on with the circuit-riding and the preaching if he'd had to depend on any other horse than Pilgrim. That horse just knew father was sick and forgetful. He wouldn't budge if father forgot the saddle-bags. When Pilgrim balked, father always knew he'd forgotten something and he'd go back for it. I'll have supper on by the time you're washed up, Jason."

The little stove that was set in the fireplace roared lustily. The kettle was singing. The old yellow cat slept cozily in the wooden rocker on the patch-work cushion. All the furniture was simple and worn and there was not much of it. A Methodist circuit-rider in Ohio moved every year. His wife reduced moving and living to pathetically simple terms.



Jason washed at the bench in the corner, then sat down while his mother put the supper before him—fried mush, fried salt pork, tea and apple sauce.

"Well," said Jason soberly, "what are we going to do now, mother? Father's gone and—"

His mother's trembling lips warned him to stop. "It doesn't seem possible," she said, "that it's only a week since we laid him away."

JASON interrupted gently. "I know, mother; but you and I have got to go on living!"

"It's you I'm worrying about," said his mother. "I can get along, with the help of a little sewing and a little nursing here in the village, the cow, and the chickens, and Old Pilgrim. But you, Jason, after the doctor's bills are paid, how am I going to keep you in Philadelphia?"

"Mother, I've got to get the money somehow. Just a year more with Dr. Edwards and I can go into partnership with him. If we can just get enough together to get me back there, I'll manage somehow."

Jason's mother sighed. "Seems as if we'd ought to have saved something out of your father's salary. Two hundred and fifty dollars a year besides donation parties is a good deal of money. But it went, especially after he was sickly. Poor father! I've let most everything go so as to send you the money, Jason. I'm most at my wits' end now. But you've got to be a doctor! Our hearts always were set on it as much as yours, Jason. Grandma's silver teapot, that kept you a month, and father's watch nearly six months."

JASON was very like his mother, yet very unlike. Where her face was sweet and tremulous, his was cool and still. His brown eyes were careless, hers were eager. His long, strong hands were smooth and quiet. Hers were knotted and work-calloused and a little uncertain. As if something in her words irritated him with the sense of her sacrifice, Jason said:

"Well, what did you and father start me on this doctor idea for, if you felt it was going to cost too much?"

"No! No! It's not that!" cried his mother.

"There are still some things to go, Jason. Take the St. Bartholomew candlestick up to Mr. Inchpin. He always has wanted it. That will give you your fare to Philadelphia."

Jason looked up at the queerly wrought silver candlestick that was more like an old oil lamp than a candlestick. His mother's grandmother had brought it from France with her. The family legend was that some Huguenot ancestor had come through the massacre of St. Bartholomew with this only relic of his home wrapped in his bosom.

"Good!" said Jason eagerly. "The old thing is neither fish nor flesh anyhow. Too big-mouthed for a candle, and folks are going to use coal-oil more and more anyhow. I'll be off to-morrow!"

"To-morrow's Thanksgiving, Jason," said his mother.

"I'll be glad to forget it," said the young doctor. "God knows we've nothing to be thankful for."

His mother looked at him a little curiously—for a mother. "Were you ever thankful to anybody, for anything, Jason?" she asked dryly.

"I've seldom had anything to feel grateful about," answered Jason coolly. "All I can remember all my life is mush and milk, and poverty, and wearing the pants of the rich boy of the town we happened to be in. I'll go up to see Inchpin to-night, mother—then I can get off by noon to-morrow."

IT WAS on Thanksgiving Day of 1862 that Jason started back to Philadelphia. He said good-by to his mother affectionately, and promised to write frequently.

Three times a week during the year that followed Jason's mother saddled Old Pilgrim and rode down to the post-office after the shrieks of the whistle had warned her that the tri-weekly river packet had come and gone. Four times during the year she heard from Jason. Each time he was doing well and wanted money. The first time Jason's mother sold her mahogany hat-box to the store-keeper's wife. The second time the cameo pin went to the doctor's wife. The third time she could send nothing, she wrote Jason—and she wrote in deep contrition, for she knew that Jason was half-starving himself and working hard. The fourth letter was urgent.

"I'm going into the army, mother. There's a wonderful chance for surgeons now. I must have a hundred dollars, though, to buy into partnership with Dr. Edwards before I go. That assures me of a good berth as soon as the war is over. I think you had better sell Pilgrim. You really don't need him, and you can get a hundred for him easily, if you sell him to the Government. Mr. Inchpin would tend to it for you."

Jason's mother read the letter heavily. It was November again. The river packets would not make many more trips. Drearily the Kentucky

[Continued on page 42]



KATHLEEN NORRIS

Author of "Mother," begins her latest novel,

"UNEDUCATING MARY"

in the November

WOMAN'S HOME COMPANION

15c. at all news-stands



ANNE MORGAN

daughter of the late J. Pierpont Morgan, is writing a series of articles to the

AMERICAN GIRL

which begins in the November

WOMAN'S HOME COMPANION

15c. at all news-stands

"Benefits Forgot"

[Continued from page 5]

hills rolled back from the river, and drearily the Ohio valleys stretched inland. Old Pilgrim plodded patiently toward his stable and his mistress huddled in the saddle, unheeding until Pilgrim stamped impatiently at the stable door. Then she dismounted and the great horse stamped into his stall.

"I know that I don't need you, Pilgrim," she said. "It's just that you are like a living bit of Father—and if Jason would only seem to understand that, it wouldn't be so hard to let you go. I wonder if all young folks are like Jason?"

Old Pilgrim leaned his head over his stall and in the November gloaming he looked long at his mistress with his wise and gentle eyes. It was as if he would tell her that he had learned that youth is always a little hard; that only long years in harness with always the back-breaking load to pull, not for oneself, but for others, can make the really grateful heart. One of the sweet, deep compensations of the years, the old horse seemed to say, is that gratitude grows in the soul.

So Jason and Old Pilgrim both went to war. They did not see each other, but each one, in his own way, made a brilliant record. Pilgrim learned the sights and sounds and smells of war. The fearful pools of blood ceased to send him plunging and rearing in harness. The screams of utter fear or of mortal agony no longer set him to neighing or sweating in sympathy. Pilgrim, superb in strength and superb in intelligence, plodded efficiently through a battle just as he had plodded efficiently over the circuit of Jason's Methodist father.

And Jason, cool and clear-headed, with his wonderful long strong hands, sawed and sewed and probed and purged his way through field hospital after field hospital, until the men began to hear of his skill and to ask for him when the fear of death was on them. His work absorbed him more and more, until months went by, and he neglected to write to his mother! Just why, who can say? Each of us, looking into his heart, perhaps can find some answer. But Jason was young, and work and world hungry. He did not ask himself embarrassing questions. The months slipped into a year, and the first year into a second year. Still Jason did not write to his mother, nor did he longer hear from her.

In November of the second year Jason was stationed in the hospital near Richmond. One rainy morning as he made his way to the cot of a man who was dying of gangrene, an orderly stepped him.

"This is Dr. Jason Wilkins?"

"Yes."

"Sorry, doctor, but I've got to arrest you and take you to Washington—"

Jason looked the orderly over incredulously. "You've got the wrong man, friend."

The soldier drew a heavy envelope carefully from his heart, and handed it to Jason. Jason opened it uneasily, and gasped. This is what he read: "Show this to Surgeon Jason Wilkins, — Regiment, Richmond, Virginia. Arrest him. Bring him to me immediately. A. Lincoln."

Jason whitened. "What's up?" he asked the orderly.

"I didn't ask the President," replied the orderly dryly. "We'll start at once, if you please, doctor."

In a daze Jason left for Washington. He thought of all the minor offenses he had committed. But they were only such as any young fellow might be guilty of. He could not believe that any of them had reached Mr. Lincoln's ears, or that, if they had, the great man in the White House would have heeded them.

Jason was locked in a room in a Washington boarding-house for one night. The next day at noon the orderly called for him. Weak-kneed, Jason followed him up the long drive to the door of the White House, and into a room where there were more orderlies and a man at a desk writing. An hour of dazed waiting, then a man came out of a door and spoke to the man at the desk—

"Surgeon Jason Wilkins," said the sentry.

"Here!" answered Jason.

"This way," jerked the orderly, and Jason found himself in the inner room, with the door closed behind him. The room was empty, yet filled. There was but one man in it besides Jason, but that man was Mr. Lincoln, who sat at a desk, with his somber eyes on Jason's face—still a cool young face, despite trembling knees.

"You are Jason Wilkins?" said Mr. Lincoln.

"Yes, Mr. President," replied the young surgeon.

"Where are you from?"

"Green Valley, Ohio."

"Have you any relatives?"

"Only my mother is living."

"Yes, only a mother! Well, young man, how is your mother?"

Jason stammered, "Why, why—I don't know!"

"You don't know!" thundered Lincoln. "And why don't you know? Is she living or dead?"

"I don't know," said Jason. "To tell the truth, I've neglected to write and I don't suppose she knows where I am."

There was silence in the room. Mr. Lincoln clenched a great fist on his desk, and his eyes scorched Jason. "I had a letter from her. She supposes you dead and asked me to trace your grave. What was the matter with her? No good? Like most mothers, a poor sort? Eh? Answer me, sir?"

Jason bristled a little. "The best woman that ever lived, Mr. President."

"Ah!" breathed Mr. Lincoln. "Still you have no reason to be grateful to her! How'd you get your training as a surgeon? Who paid for it? Your father?"

Jason reddened. "Well, no; father was a poor Methodist preacher. Mother raised the money, though I worked for my board mostly."

"Yes, how'd she raise the money?"

Jason's lips were stiff. "Selling things, Mr. President."

"What did she sell?"

"Father's watch—the old silver teapot—the mahogany hat-box—the St. Bartholomew candlestick. Old things mostly; beyond use except in museums."

Again silence in the room, while a look of contempt gathered in Abraham Lincoln's eyes that seared Jason's cool young soul till it scorched within him. "You poor fool!" said Lincoln. "You poor worm! Her household treasures—one by one—for you. 'Useless things—fit for museums!' Oh, you fool!"

Jason flushed angrily and bit his lips. Suddenly the President rose and pointed a long, bony finger at his desk. "Come here and sit down and write a letter to your mother!"

Jason stalked obediently over and sat down in the President's seat. Anger and mortification were ill inspirations for letter-writing, but under Lincoln's burning eyes Jason seized a pen and wrote his mother a stilted note. Lincoln paced the floor, pausing now and again to look over Jason's shoulder.

"Address it and give it to me," said the President. "I'll see that it gets to her." Then, his stern voice rising a little: "And now, Jason Wilkins, as long as you are in the army, you write to your mother once a week. If I have reason to correct you on the matter again, I'll have you court-martialed."

Jason rose and handed the letter to the President, then stood, angry and silent, awaiting further orders. Abraham Lincoln took another turn or two up and down the room. Then he paused before the window and looked from it a long, long time. Finally he turned to Jason.

"My boy," he said gently, "there is no finer quality in the world than gratitude. There is nothing a man can have in his heart so mean, so low as ingratitude. Even a dog appreciates a kindness, never forgets a soft word, or a bone. To my mind, the noblest holiday in the world is Thanksgiving. And, next the Creator, there is no one the holiday should be dedicated to as much as to mothers."

Again Lincoln paused, and looked from the boyish face of the young surgeon out of the window at the bleak November skies, and Lincoln said to Jason, with God

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(54)

"Benefits Forgot"

knows what tragedy of memory in his lonely heart:

*"Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky:
Thou dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot."*

Another pause. "You may go, my boy." And Lincoln shook hands with Jason, who stumbled from the room, his mind a chaos of resentment and anger. He made his way down Pennsylvania Avenue, pausing as two army officers rode up to a hotel and dismounted, leaving their horses. Something about the big gray that one of the officers rode seemed vaguely familiar to the young doctor. The gray turned his small, intelligent head toward Jason, then with a sudden soft whinny, laid his head on Jason's shoulder and nuzzled his cheek gently. Jason looked at the right fore shoulder. A three-cornered scar was there. Jason and Old Pilgrim never had met but once, and yet—Jason was little more than a boy. Suddenly he threw his arms around Old Pilgrim's neck, and sobbed into the silky mane. Passers-by glanced curiously and then went on—Washington was full of tears those days.

Pilgrim whinnied and waited patiently. Finally Jason wiped his eyes. "I'll buy you back from Captain Winston, Pilgrim. I'll get a furlough, if I have to ask the President himself. We'll get home to mother for Thanksgiving, Pilgrim. We will, if God will let my unworthy hulk live that long."

And Pilgrim, with a scar on his right fore shoulder, and Jason with the scar on his soul that only remorse imprints there, started that evening for Green Valley.

The Clinging Vine

[Continued from page 10]

Mary. I can lay my hand face up. "Now listen to me," he commanded, his voice taking on the harsh, imperious quality that had won him the title of The Iron Boss. "I know everything. How you write your husband's speeches, the two stenographers in the house disguised as maid and sewing-woman, your conferences with Driscoll and Riddle—why, I can take your whole bag of tricks and dump them out before you. The sewing-machine with its concealed typewriter, the pedestal with its pigeon-holes. It took my man two hours to find them.

"I was a fool not to have guessed the truth in the judicial campaign," he went on savagely, seeming to find a certain joy in the white, sick face that stared at him so beseechingly. "Madison never had an idea in his life. He was an ass in school. When he came out for judge and commenced to make those smashing speeches, I concluded that one of the young fellows in his law office must be managing him. This mayoralty campaign set me guessing again, however, for every now and then I caught flashes of genius. My first tip came through the waste paper we bought from your furnace-man. Then we trailed Driscoll to the house and established the fact that he came to report progress and get orders from you. After that we identified the sewing-woman as Janet Laidlaw, a settlement worker, and the maid as Emma Edgerton, a secretary from the suffragist organization in New York. Enough detail?" he asked abruptly. No word came from the stiff lips of the woman.

"A wonderful piece of work, Mary! Absolutely nothing to go on at the start but a voice, a frock coat, a slouch hat and a Henry Clay face. And the ideas you have hitched to that bull voice! Heaven only knows how you have managed the speeches. I haven't been able to find out. But I do know Madison's mania against the emancipated woman or anything approaching it, and I do know his inflated, sensitive egotism that would never permit him knowingly to use another's ideas, much less when that other

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